

Cleared for takeoff: Communities rally behind athletes at departure parties

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▲ Special Olympics Airlift

On Friday, June 19, 2026, airports across the United States will come alive as Special Olympics athletes and coaches begin their journey to the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games in Minnesota's Twin Cities. From small regional airports to major aviation hubs, local communities will gather to send off their hometown athletes during Special Olympics Airlift departure parties — moments of celebration that mark the first step in an unforgettable experience.

Organized by Textron Aviation in collaboration with Exclusive FBO Sponsor Signature Aviation, departure parties are held at select airports nationwide where athletes and coaches board Cessna, Beechcraft and Hawker aircraft bound for St. Paul Downtown Airport (STP). These events reflect the pride and excitement of local communities, bringing together families, volunteers, aviation professionals and supporters to cheer on athletes as they head to the Games.

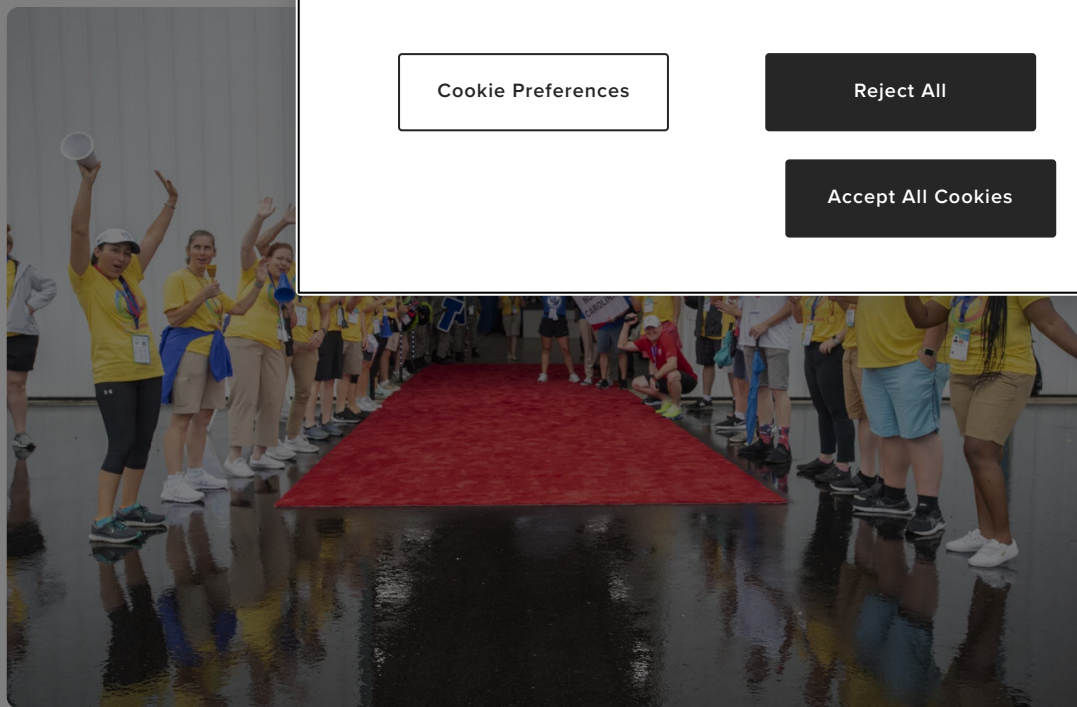
Each departure party has its own local flavor, but the spirit is the same everywhere. Music, signs, applause and heartfelt farewells create an atmosphere of encouragement and celebration as athletes prepare for takeoff. Volunteer pilots, known as Doves, welcome athletes and their families with care, enthusiasm and

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▲ Special Olympics Airlift-2

For many athletes, this flight represents far more than transportation. It is a memorable experience that combines the excitement of flight with the encouragement of a community showing its support as they head to the Games. The sendoff serves as a visible reminder that they are supported not only by their families and coaches, but by an entire network of people who believe in their achievements and are excited to see them compete on the national stage.

Following departure, aircraft from across the country converge on St. Paul Downtown Airport, where athletes and coaches arrive as part of the world's largest peacetime airlift. Upon landing, participants are welcomed at the Champion Center, a dedicated arrival space designed to celebrate athletes as they step off the aircraft and prepare for the Games. From greeting volunteers to coordinated ground support, the Champion Center provides a warm, organized transition from travel to competition.

Together, departure parties and the Champion Center frame the beginning of the Airlift experience — one rooted in celebration, dignity and community. From the moment athletes leave their home airports to their arrival in Minnesota, every step of the journey is designed to honor their commitment.

As the aviation community celebrates these moments — the underscore what makes the Games, but about the

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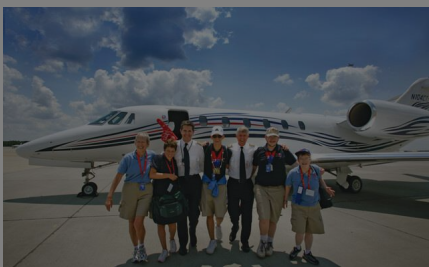
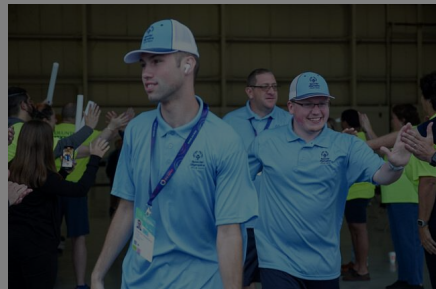
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Special Olympics Airlift, Minnesota — athletes to the mile of the way.

Textron Aviation invites you to contribute to Special Olympics in support of the Airlift. Donations to the Special Olympics, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, may offer potential tax benefits for donors. Visit airlift.txtav.com to donate or explore in-kind support opportunities.



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About Special Olympics Airlift

The Special Olympics Airlift, organized by [Textron Aviation](#) and its customers in collaboration with the Special Olympics community and impact.

Since the Airlift's inception, we have helped the aviation community to transport athletes to the Special Olympics USA Games, helping ensure their success.

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